



Anxious Gardeners Should Practice Patience

We are all tempted to get in the garden, to get a jump on spring garden chores, but be patient. Beyond pruning, there is little to do in the landscape that is prudent right now. A bit of caution now can prevent problems later.

A warm spell tempts us to do an early spring cleanup: pulling off last season's dead foliage and removing mulch from perennial borders. Unfortunately, more often than not, periods of freezing weather continue much later than we hope. Once dead foliage and mulch is removed, plants are more exposed to cold temperatures and damage or death may result.

Early spring this year has been very cold delaying your spring cleanup. When you are finally able to get started, you will be able to pull dead foliage from some perennials; others will require pruners. Compost clippings unless the plant suffered from disease or insect infestation.

Remove mulch in stages to ease plants into their spring awakening, but keep some nearby and be prepared to replace it if another dip in temperature is forecasted.



An exception to this rule: spring-flowering bulbs. Most of these are unscathed by the cold days of early spring. Even if a series of warm days have prompted them to peek out of the soil, their growth is rarely affected by an April snowstorm or a cold snap. Some of the earliest bulbs, including snowdrops, are often seen poking through late winter snow cover.

As you revel in the color of your spring bulbs and pat yourself on the back for planting those bulbs last fall, notice areas you could use more. Make notes of the types of bulbs you'd like to add and where to plant them in your garden journal or on your September calendar. You may think you'll remember, but memories seem to wither along with the bulb's foliage.

Don't be too anxious to dig in the soil once the snow has finally all melted. Spring soil is generally very moist and with all the snowfall of the past winter, soil may remain wetter than usual. Working the soil while it's too wet results in compaction of our clay soils.

The health of your plants is directly related to the quality of your soil. Soil structure is based on a network of soil particles and the space between them. When clay soils are worked when they are too wet, they become impervious to air and water. They become inhospitable to plant roots.

A quick test to determine whether your soil is ready to be worked: take a handful of soil and gently squeeze. When you open your hand, if the ball of soil is easily broken apart it

is dry enough to work. If the soil ball stays together or only breaks apart slightly, wait a few more days and try the test again.

Now is a great time to review last year's notes. What worked and what didn't? Did you start a wish list of plants you'd like to add? Check out the views from inside your house and plan ways to improve them. Consider starting some seeds indoors.

Patience now will serve you well in the upcoming season. Enjoy the beauty of spring bulbs while making a long list of all the plants you'd like to add to your landscape later in April and May.



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